Author’s response to reviews

Title: Perceptions and intervention preferences of Moroccan adolescents, parents, and teachers regarding risks and protective factors for risky sexual behaviors leading to sexually transmitted infections in adolescents: Qualitative findings

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your reply and comments.

Comments and responses:

Comment 1: Reviewer #3: This is a very interesting topic and relevant to the issues of adolescent's SRH. The general comments are that there needs to be a refinement to the objectives of the study, clarification of definitions (youth, young people, adolescents) and more information on Morrocan adolescents in the literature. There are several references to sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the US in your introduction and discussion which have very different contexts when it comes to adolescents’ sexual and reproductive health. I would suggest you align your research to be relevant with countries of the same context.

Response: Thank you for this comment which is very useful. Based on your suggestions, we have refined the objectives of the study as well as the requested definitions. We have focused more on adolescents’ data (STIs) in the introduction section. We have also added available information regarding STIs on Moroccan adolescents. In addition, we have aligned our research...
to be relevant with countries in the MENA region that have the same context by using available references and studies conducted in this region. All changes made in the manuscript are colored in red.

Specific comments:

Grammatical issues,

Comment 2: page 7, line 142-144 - This sentence needs rephrasing, a little confusing.
Response: Thank you for this comment. This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:

“This design, which allows exploring the views of different groups in a similar category or in different categories [41], suits our purpose and has enabled us to consider three different views of three categories of participants [42].”

Response: These were rephrased and edited as follows:

Line 148-149: “Given that this study was part of a larger project, we followed the recommendation of recruiting 3 to 6 focus groups (with 4 to 8 participants per group) for each category of participants, resulting in a total number of 12 to 48 participants per category”

Line 153-157: “From each school, adolescents in the last year of middle school aged 14 to 16 years were interviewed. This age group was selected because their school curriculum includes topics related to health risk behaviors. In addition, we conducted 5 FGDs of parents (5 girls and 21 men) who were selected based on their voluntary participation.”

Comment 4: Page 9, line 195
Response: This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:

“The names of participants were kept separately from tape recordings, transcripts, and field notes, and saved in a private place where only the principal author had access.”

Comment 5: Page 10, line 218-227
Response: This paragraph was rephrased and edited as follows:
“All coding differences were resolved and the codes were refined and grouped into key themes. The themes generated capture something important about the data in relation to the research question. The next phase consisted of reviewing themes, which is an iterative process, as we constantly moved back and forth between the selected extracts from the data and the entire dataset to ensure the applicability of themes. Once the themes have been established, they were defined and labeled in such a way that they are conceptually distinguishable from each other. After that, the process of writing the final report began by making a set of fully-developed themes with vivid examples reflecting the essence of each theme, and contributing significantly to answering the research question.”

Comment 6: Page 10, line 237
Response: This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:

“Most of the adolescents perceived that their information regarding sexuality and STIs, including HIV, were lacking, particularly about STIs mode of transmission and prevention methods. They also revealed their need to know more about sexuality and STIs.”

Comment 7: Page 21, line 469- 471
Response: This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:

“Participants suggested a number of possible interventions to improve sexual health and reduce HIV/STI risk among adolescents. We have categorized these suggestions into socio-ecological levels. Table 3 presents illustrative quotes from different focus groups in support of intervention preferences.”

Comment 8: Page 22 line 483
Response: This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:

“They also stressed that parental guidance is necessary and parents must ensure that their children watch age-appropriate programs without any pornographic content.”

Comment 9: Page 23, line 519
Response: This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:
“Other parents and teachers suggested that the Ministry of Health should help raise adolescent awareness about risky sexual behaviors and STIs by organizing targeted and ongoing sensitization campaigns at school.”

Comment 10: Page 25 line 564
Response: This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:

“We observed that poverty and lack of financial resources in some girls, can lead them to exchange sex for money to afford expensive clothes, and mobile phones, which may increase the risk of STI acquisition among these girls.”

Comment 11: Under Background in the abstract: Bring STIs more to the forefront, your focus is on risky and protective sexual practices leading to STIs, yet this is not mentioned in the background nor aims (p.g 6, line 133-137).

Response: Thank you for this comment. We have edited the background in the abstract based on your suggestion. We have also mentioned our focus on risks and protective factors of risky sexual practices leading to STIs in the background and the aim in the manuscripts.

Comment 12: What does adolescence period mean? Menarche? Perhaps rephrase this more clearly.
Page 5, Line 94-96: "Many individuals...." Are these adolescents?
Response: we meant by adolescence period the period of life in which adolescents reach sexual maturity. It was added and edited in the manuscript.
Yes, "Many individuals...." meant adolescents, it was also corrected.

Comment 13: Introduction section needs more information on adolescents. In page 4, line 78-80, there is information in Morocco, however we do not know about the adolescent situation in Morocco. Additionally, there is reference to adolescents, youth, young people, you need to be consistent in referring to specific populations, for instance adolescents are 10-19-year old, young people includes up to 24-year-old. Is there more information on adolescents (your specific target group) in Morocco? If not have comparisons with countries with a similar context to Morocco.
Response: Thank you for this comment it is very helpful. We have focused more on adolescents aged 10-19-year old in the background. In addition, we have added some available information regarding STIs on adolescents in Morocco and in some MENA countries. We must note that the data regarding adolescents’ sexual behaviors and STIs in MENA countries are very limited; as reported by several studies:


Comment 14: Page 6, line 140: Under methods, you did not triangulate the data. Triangulation is using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. In your research, only FGDs were used, please rephrase.

Response: Thanks for this clarification it is very helpful. The sentence was rephrased as you requested:

“We collected data through focus group discussions (FGDs) with three different categories of participants (adolescents, parents, and teachers).”

Comment 15: Page 8, line 175-176: rephrase perceived barriers and facilitators for risky sexual behaviours… to perceived risky behaviors and protective factors for sexual behaviours and STIs.

Response: Thanks for this comment. This sentence was rephrased and edited as follows:

“...used to explore perceived risks and protective factors of risky sexual behaviors leading to STIs in adolescents…”

Comment 16: Page 10, line 235: Theme 1, rephrase heading to Risky sexual practices and STIs (Individual level) and merge with theme 2- Knowledge goes hand in hand with practices to some extent (transactional sex and alcohol and drug use)
Response: Thank you for this comment it is very helpful. Theme 1 was rephrased and merged with Theme 2 as you requested:

“Theme 1: Risky sexual practices and STIs (individual level)”

Comment 17: Page 17, line 379-380: What is meant by students do not react in an active way? Please rephrase or elaborate more.

Response: This sentence was elaborated and edited as follows:

“…and such discussion is not always easy because students feel embarrassed and unable to communicate or interact positively with their teachers.”

Comment 18: Page 18- Theme 5: Social media is part of media and internet, perhaps rephrase to say "Media, including internet and social media."

Response: This theme was rephrased as you recommend:

“Theme 4: Media, including internet and social media (societal level)”

Comment 19: Page 19- 21: Theme 6 can be rephrased to Socio- cultural norms, the sub- themes (normalization, religiosity) are unnecessary.

Response: This theme was rephrased and edited as you recommend and the sub- themes (normalization, religiosity) were removed.

“Theme 5: Socio-cultural norms (societal level)”

Comment 20: Page 21 line 473-475: this paragraph is confusing, please elaborate or rephrase.

Response: Thanks for this comment it was very helpful. This paragraph is rephrased and edited as follows:

“In all three FGDs, many participants suggested that implementing interventions aiming to enhance religious beliefs, knowledge of sexuality and STIs, and safer sex skills could have positive outcomes on adolescent awareness and behaviors. Thereby, such interventions could promote safe sexual practices and reduce risky ones.”